

HOUSE OF CARDS

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Written by

Beau Willimon

Adapted from the BBC miniseries

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INT. GRAND BALLROOM - SECONDS UNTIL MIDNIGHT

A loud, raucous count-down. DC's Democratic Party elite are watching the Times Square ball drop on massive monitors.

Three! Two! One! Noisemakers. Applause. People kiss and hug. The sound fades as one face in the crowd, FRANCIS UNDERWOOD turns to the camera.

Francis is Richard III, Iago and Hannibal Lecter all rolled into one - sly, intelligent eyes, mischievous lips and a deep baritone dripping with Southern charm.

FRANCIS

A New Year, a new era...

We PAN to the stage to reveal a beaming GARRETT WALKER (late 40s), the apotheosis of leadership, charisma and dignity. He's flanked by his family - wife PATRICIA and two teenage sons. They lead the crowd in "Auld Lang Syne."

FRANCIS (V.O.)

President-Elect Garrett Walker. Green behind the ears? Yes. Too idealistic? Perhaps. Aloof and elitist? Certainly. But he has my respect. Anyone who can get 70 million people to vote for him deserves as much.

(beat)

As for the rest of his administration...

Francis glowers to the camera.

FRANCIS

...that's a different matter.

We CUT TO to Walker's soon-to-be V.P. JIM MATTHEWS (early 60s) and his large gaggle of a family.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

If anything ever happens to Walker, God forbid, Jim Matthews will take his place. Until then, he'll do what all Vice Presidents do - absolutely nothing.

CUT TO Walker's recently appointed Chief of Staff LINDA VASQUEZ. She's in the back of the ballroom, being prepped with make-up for a TV stand-up interview. She looks severe, deadly, cunning.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
Linda Vasquez - Walker's Chief of
Staff. A big swinging pudenda.

The lights from the TV cam flip on, bathing her face in a
bright glow. She instantly flashes a toothy smile.

...Stainless steel pudenda.

We CUT BACK TO Francis standing in the crowd, his arm around
the waist of his perfectly groomed wife CLAIRE.

FRANCIS
As for me? I'm the Chief Whip.
House Majority Whip to be exact.
In other words I'm a slave driver.
And these are my slaves...

The shot now WIDENS as we pan over the sea of people singing.

FRANCIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Welcome to Washington.

TITLE AND CREDITS

Iconic shots of D.C. - the Capitol, the Washington Monument,
Lincoln Memorial, Reflecting Pool, etc. But we see them from
odd angles, cast in dark shadows or beneath moody skies. The
feeling should be ominous.

We shift to interiors - dark hallways and restaurant booths
where slow-motion, silhouetted figures conspire with one
another.

Interlaced with all of this are recurring shots of dextrous
hands expertly shuffling a deck of cards and dealing them
out. The FINAL IMAGE should be of the dealer unveiling his
hand to the camera: not four, but FIVE one-eyed jacks.

INT. FRANCIS'S CAR - NIGHT

Francis and his wife ride in their chauffeured sedan.

CLAIRE
So it's definite.

FRANCIS
I've said so a hundred times.

CLAIRE
Completely definite. As in pigs
will fly, hell will freeze over and
Jesus will sodomize the Holy Ghost
if you're wrong.

FRANCIS
Yes, yes and yes. I have a meeting
with Walker and Vasquez tomorrow.

CLAIRE
And after that they'll announce.

FRANCIS
Patience Claire.

CLAIRE
Patience. Thirty years of
patience.

FRANCIS
(suddenly curt)
Enough. I won't spend the first
moments of 2013 being lectured to
like a school boy.

CLAIRE
You're right. You're absolutely
right. I'm sorry Francis.

He turns to her with a naughty glimmer in his eye.

FRANCIS
How sorry are you?

She smirks back at him seductively.

CLAIRE
(with a little girl voice)
I'm very, very sorry, Daddy.

FRANCIS
Good. Now give Daddy a kiss.

She leans in very close and places her bare teeth on his
neck. Slowly presses them into his skin. He winces with
pleasure.

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - NEWSROOM - MORNING

A bustling bull-pen of writers, editors and assistants.
Mounted TVs blare with 24 hour news channels. The steady
clacking of keyboards wafts from a sea of cubicles.

ZOE BARNES (late 20s) - a gorgeous and hungry young reporter - weaves through the cubicles toward an office enclosed by a glass wall.

Inside LUCAS GOODWIN (mid 30s) - the handsome if frumpy Deputy Editor - is talking to MARK HAMMERSCHMIDT (early 50s) - the paper's grizzled Editor and Chief.

Zoe waits by the open door and listens in.

HAMMERSCHMIDT

...Six vote majority in the Senate.
The Republicans will filibuster his
ass to kingdom come.

LUCAS

It'll be ugly.

HAMMERSCHMIDT

I hope so. The uglier the better.
Any guess what's on the plate?

LUCAS

No idea. All my regular sources
are keeping pretty tight-lipped
about it.

HAMMERSCHMIDT

Keep digging.

LUCAS

I'm on it.

Hammerschmidt gives him a slap on the back and exits,
brushing past Zoe, whom he barely notices.

ZOE

Good morning Mr. Hammerschmidt.

He shoots her a quizzical look.

ZOE (CONT'D)

Zoe Barnes. I cover the City
Council.

HAMMERSCHMIDT

Right, right. Keep up the uh...the
good work.

He gives her a cursory pat on the back and he's off. Zoe
leans against the doorway a tad provocatively.

ZOE

The Hammer wants a scoop?

LUCAS
You were eaves-dropping?

ZOE
I'm shameless. That's what makes me a good reporter.

LUCAS
What can I do for you Zoe?

ZOE
I'm sick of the City Council.

LUCAS
I know you are. You tell me everyday.

ZOE
Move me online.

LUCAS
(as if it's silly)
Online? To do what?

ZOE
A blog. First person, subjective, sexy. Femme Fatale on the street. I'll go underground, real behind the scenes stuff. Parties. Restaurants, back rooms, hotel rooms. The real pulse of what's going on.

LUCAS
Like the Wonkette or something?

ZOE
Better. Dirtier. Grittier.

LUCAS
This is the *Washington Herald* Zoe, it's not TMZ.

ZOE
You know how many people watch TMZ?

LUCAS
Frankly I don't care.

ZOE
Which is why print journalism is dying.

LUCAS

Well if it's gonna die, it'll die with dignity. At least at this paper.

ZOE

All I'm asking is that you run it past the Hammer.

LUCAS

He'd laugh in my face.

ZOE

Then let me run it past him personally. He can laugh in mine.

LUCAS

It's not gonna happen.

ZOE

You're stuck in the 20th century Lucas. You lack imagination.

LUCAS

Maybe so, but I'm still your boss. And right now I'm not interested in imagination, I'm interested in stories.

ZOE

You're telling me to get back to work.

LUCAS

I am.

ZOE

But what you're really telling me is to fuck off.

LUCAS

I'm telling you both.

Zoe is brimming with frustration but she's too cool of a cucumber to let it show.

ZOE

Okay, you want stories? I'll go get you a goddamn story.

She turns on her heels and departs as quickly as she came.

EXT. BLAIR HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Two dozen REPORTERS are camped near the entrance to Blair House - the President-Elect's temporary quarters.

A BLACK SEDAN pulls up. Photogs angle for position. Francis exits from the car. Cameras click with rapid fire. The reporters shout for his attention. Among them is Zoe.

ZOE
Congressman! Congressman
Underwood!

But he ignores them all as he walks up the front steps.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - DOWNSTAIRS RECEPTION

Francis presents himself at the front desk.

RECEPTIONIST
(into the phone)
Congressman Underwood for the
President-Elect...Thank you.
(hangs up, to Francis)
Just a moment sir.

Francis turns to the camera.

FRANCIS
What would you give to be standing
where I'm standing now? Moments
away from sitting down with the
next leader of the free world. To
have that sort of power and
influence at your finger-tips. To
taste it...
(licks his lips)
Like you taste the salt in your
lover's sweat.

CUT TO an AIDE loping down the stairs.

AIDE
Congressman, please follow me.

INT. PRESIDENT-ELECT'S OFFICE

As the Aide lets Francis into the office, we see that it's Vasquez, not Walker, who is behind the desk. Francis registers a whiff of surprise.

VASQUEZ
Thanks for coming Frank.
(gestures at a chair)
Please...

FRANCIS
(as he sits)
Will the President-Elect be joining
us?

VASQUEZ
No. He told me to apologize on his
behalf. Something came up. But
I'll brief him on everything.

Francis has no other choice but to roll with the punches.

FRANCIS
Well, I thought it would be a good
idea to start formulating the
Administration's foreign policy
platform prior to my nomination.
(he opens a folder)
I'd like to start with the Middle
East. I think it's crucial that we -

VASQUEZ
Frank - I'm going to stop you right
there.

FRANCIS
Excuse me?

VASQUEZ
We're not nominating you for
Secretary of State.

This hits Francis right in the gut. He stares at Vasquez in
stunned silence.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, I know he made you a
promise, but circumstances have
changed.

FRANCIS
(fury rising)
The nature of promises, Linda, is
that they remain immune to changing
circumstances.

VASQUEZ

The President-Elect has thought long and hard about this, and he's decided we need you to stay in Congress.

FRANCIS

I got eight conservative Democrats to endorse him. I was personally responsible for raising two million dollars in contributions...

VASQUEZ

And the President-Elect is very grateful for everything you've done. We wouldn't have won without your help. But now we have to lead, and that means making tough choices. Our first order of business is Education Reform. Overhauling the entire system on a federal level. We want you in the House, doing what you do best - whipping up votes.

FRANCIS

I've paid my dues Linda. I deserve this.

VASQUEZ

I couldn't agree more, but there are lots of deserving people Frank. We can't nominate them all.

FRANCIS

I'd like to speak with the President-Elect personally.

VASQUEZ

The decision is made.

The two stare each other down like gunslingers.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)

We need you Frank. Desperately. Just not in the cabinet. Are you going to stand beside us or not?

It takes every ounce of will to swallow his pride.

FRANCIS

Yes. Yes I will.

VASQUEZ
I'm very glad to hear that.

FRANCIS
One question. If not me, then who?

VASQUEZ
(hesitates, then...)
Michael Kern.

He says the following with a smile, but underneath the table we can see Francis cracking his knuckles with rage.

FRANCIS
Michael Kern...Well, that's an excellent choice.

Francis stands, offers his hand.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
I appreciate you being so forthright. I remain a loyal foot-soldier, as always. Have no doubt about that.

VASQUEZ
(shakes his hand)
Thank you Frank, truly.

EXT. BLAIR HOUSE - MINUTES LATER

As Francis races down the steps to his waiting car, Zoe presses to the front of the press cordon.

ZOE
Congressman Underwood!

Another REPORTER elbows past her.

REPORTER
Is it true you're being considered for a cabinet position?

Francis pauses to address the question. Zoe slides closer, holding up her recorder to capture his response.

FRANCIS
I can't speculate as to what the President-Elect's intentions for the cabinet are. My only goal is to serve him as best I can in Congress.

Zoe catches his eye for the briefest of moments. A moment later he's in his car and gone.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - PRESIDENT-ELECT'S OFFICE - EVENING

Vasquez sits across from Walker at his desk.

WALKER

How did he take it?

VASQUEZ

How does a mistress take it when she's told she'll be spending the weekend alone after being promised a getaway to Nantucket?

WALKER

I wouldn't know.

VASQUEZ

Of course not.

WALKER

Would you?

VASQUEZ

Maybe when I was young and stupid and thought sleeping with a Senator would advance my career.

WALKER

Which Senator?

VASQUEZ

Ancient history.

WALKER

Tell me.

VASQUEZ

I'm sorry sir. A woman must keep her secrets.

WALKER

You're my Chief-of-Staff first, a woman second. And a Chief-of-Staff doesn't keep secrets from a President.

VASQUEZ

A good one does.

WALKER
(after a beat)
So I assume he didn't take it well.

VASQUEZ
No. But better than expected.

WALKER
Any cause for worry?

VASQUEZ
He's angry, but he's not stupid.
Frank knows there's much more to
gain through loyalty than by
alienating himself. I think we can
count on him.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A stately townhouse. Its furnishings are old-fashioned and elegant.

Francis paces wildly back and forth, a drink in his hand.
Claire listens stoically while her husband lets off steam.

FRANCIS
How could I have been so blind?
She back-stabbed me. I should have
known. It's obvious. She feels
threatened, so she got Walker to
cut me out of the loop. And now I
have to suck it up like some
doddering butler dismissed to the
servants' quarters.

CLAIRE
(a sparkle in her eye)
Unless...

FRANCIS
Unless what?

She takes his glass and heads to the liquor cabinet. Runs
her fingers along the door.

CLAIRE
A cabinet is just a cabinet after
all.

As she pulls a bottle of whiskey out.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
What's better? Being stuck
inside...

She places the glass atop the cabinet and freshens his drink.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
...or sitting on top?

She turns with a Machiavellian glint in her eye.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
(hands him the drink)
Glass half full my darling.

FRANCIS
Do you have any idea what that
might entail?

CLAIRE
Isn't it better if I didn't?

Francis turns to the camera.

FRANCIS
I love this woman. I love her more
than sharks love blood.

He turns back to Claire.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
(a devious smile)
This is an opportunity, isn't?

CLAIRE
(raises her glass)
To opportunities.

They clink drinks and each take a luxurious sip.

INT. REP. O'NEAL'S OFFICE - MORNING

CHRISTINA MALONE (late 20s) - sexy and headstrong - ushers a
humorless looking LOBBYIST into Rep. PATRICK O'NEAL'S unkempt
office. Christina is O'Neal's personal secretary.

CHRISTINA
Mr. Chapman, from Horizon Trust...

O'NEAL
Henry. Great to see you. Thanks
Christina.

She leaves, closing the door behind her. The two men sit.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)

How long are you in town for?
Staying for the Inauguration, I
hope. There's gonna be some great
parties. I can hook you up if you -

CHAPMAN

I'm not interested in parties. I'm
interested in the zoning laws you
promised to get changed in your
district. We've got 12 million
sitting in escrow for an empty lot
we can't build on.

O'NEAL

Yes, I know. And believe me, I'm
on it. But you gotta understand,
that's a local municipal issue. I
can't just pick up the phone and -

CHAPMAN

You can't? That's not what you
said when you begged us for fifty
grand in donations.

O'NEAL

Right. Well you see, it's
um...it's not quite as simple as -

The phone rings. O'Neal looks sympathetically to Chapman.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)

One sec.

(picks up the phone)

Christina I told you - no calls.
Not while I'm meeting with Mr.
Chapman.

(pause)

The President-Elect? Right now?

Chapman's eyes widen.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)

Do you mind?

CHAPMAN

No no, go ahead.

O'NEAL

(into the phone)

Put him through Christina.

(short beat)

(MORE)

O'NEAL (CONT'D)

Mr. President-Elect, this is quite a surprise...Well thank you, we were pleased to win with such a wide margin...Absolutely, anything you need...

(laughs boisterously)

CUT TO Christina at her desk outside the office. She's whispering into a receiver.

CHRISTINA

I need you to put that long, wet, talented tongue of yours between my thighs and make me squeal like Miss Piggy.

CUT BACK TO O'NEAL on his phone.

O'NEAL

Me too, me too...Okay, thanks again Mr. President-Elect. Talk to you soon.

And he hangs up.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)

So sorry about that. Now we were discussing zoning...

CHAPMAN

That was really the President?

O'NEAL

President-Elect, but same difference right?

INT. FRANCIS'S OFFICE - DAY

Francis is behind his desk - ornate and spacious compared to O'Neal's - watching a mounted flat-screen TV on mute.

DOUG STAMPER (early 40s) - Francis's well-connected, amoral and loyal Chief-of-Staff - enters with two brown paper bags. As he places the bags on the desk...

STAMPER

It's not easy to find low-carb, low-sodium, no cholesterol, gluten-free chow in this town. Basically you'll be eating a single grain of rice for lunch.

Francis glumly points to the TV. Stamper looks over.

TIGHT on screen. MICHAEL KERN (50s) - clean-cut and handsome - is speaking at a lectern, flanked by Walker and Vasquez. The ticker-tape reads: KERN NOMINATED FOR SEC. OF STATE.

STAMPER (CONT'D)

Turn it up.

FRANCIS

It's hard enough to stare at his
sublimely chiseled face. Don't
make me listen to that grating Cape
Cod squawk of his.

STAMPER

I think he's had work done. A chin-
tuck. Probably botox. He
definitely dyes his hair.

FRANCIS

What was Walker thinking?

STAMPER

Or rather Vasquez.

FRANCIS

She must have a fondness for pretty-
boy, nut-less, sycophants.

STAMPER

Maybe the GOP won't confirm him.

FRANCIS

Oh no, they'll confirm him. He's
much more valuable to the
opposition as a poster-child for
fanatic liberalism. Soft on
defense, an ally to our enemies -
the usual Glenn Beck routine.
They'll eat him alive.

STAMPER

Is it still too late to make a
play?

FRANCIS

For me? Yes. But I've got
something else in mind.

STAMPER

(eyes lighting up)
Do tell.

Francis opens his brown paper bag, sniffs it. Grimaces.

FRANCIS

I really need to talk to Claire
about this diet she has me on.

Tosses the bag aside and stands.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

I'm going to get some real food.

STAMPER

Don't leave me in suspense.

FRANCIS

A half-baked plan is the quickest
road to failure, my friend. And
failure is something we cannot
afford. Once I've hashed it out
I'll let you know.

(as he exits)

Bon appetit.

INT. CAPITOL MESS HALL - LATER

Francis waits in the checkout line. Heaped on his tray is a
burger, fries, slice of chocolate cake and a very large soda.

We hear some commotion. Entering the mess hall is Michael
Kern followed by a couple of AIDES half a dozen REPORTERS.
Francis is disgusted at the brouhaha.

But then he turns to the camera and instantly paints a
sincere smile across his lips. Makes his way over to Kern.

KERN

(to the reporters)

Please folks, I'll answer all your
questions in a few minutes, but
give me a chance to grab a sandwich
first...

FRANCIS

Michael. I just saw the
announcement. Congratulations. I
can't imagine a better man for the
job.

KERN

Well thank you Frank, that means a
lot to me coming from you.

REPORTER

Congressman Underwood, at one point
weren't you a contender for the -

FRANCIS

Please, save your questions for my colleague here. This is his day. I'm just a humble admirer.

A few chuckles from the reporters.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

And Francis leaves Kern to his reporters. Turns to the camera as he walks away.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

A smile, a handshake, a few kind words. And with that one wraps oneself in a cloak of civility.

He stops. Suddenly sneers. It's terrifying.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

But when the cloak comes off - when you see the real me? When your heart freezes and the blood drains from your face? You won't even be able to scream for help, because by then I've already slit your throat.

His eyes return to their cool middle-distance. It's alarming how quickly his emotions can turn on a dime - how much command he has over them. He looks back over to Kern. Smiles almost sympathetically.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Poor Kern. The sad son of a bitch doesn't even know what's coming.

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - NEWSROOM - NIGHT

JANINE SKORSKY (late 30s) - as homely as she's ruthless - is punching away at her computer. She's the epitome of the old-school (and dying) breed of acerbic print journalists. Zoe leans over her cubicle partition.

JANINE

(without looking up)

What is it Zoe?

ZOE

I heard you're going to be the new White House Correspondent.

JANINE
(flatly)
That's right.

Zoe lingers for a moment. Janine finally looks up.

JANINE (CONT'D)
Is there something else you wanted?

ZOE
Well...I know you're going to have
your hands full, so if you need
somebody to help you on anything -
do research, punch out background
copy - I'd be happy to do it.

JANINE
(eyes narrowing)
I think I'll be fine.

ZOE
Yeah, totally. But if things - you
know - get crazy, and you need any
help or anything...

JANINE
So you can blog about rubbing
shoulders with the big boys and
girls?

ZOE
How did you hear about -

JANINE
"Reporter." Go look it up in the
dictionary. It's somebody who
knows things.

ZOE
I'm sorry for trying to be a team
player. I won't make that mistake
again.

JANINE
(makes a shooing motion)
Go, shoo. Shoo.

Zoe turns and walks off, humiliated.

INT. LAFAYETTE PARK CHURCH - MORNING

The service is chock full of DC's political heavyweights, including Francis and his wife seated near the back. A MINISTER is in the midst of delivering a sermon.

MINISTER

I'd like to speak today on the subject of Humility. A lot of you just won re-election. If you hadn't, you probably wouldn't be sitting here right now.

A smattering of chuckles among the congregation.

MINISTER (CONT'D)

But keep in mind that success is fleeting. You'll have many challenges ahead over the next couple of years. And a person's character is not determined by how he or she enjoys victory, but rather how he or she endures defeat.

Francis turns to face the camera while the sermon continues in the background.

FRANCIS

Wise words, no doubt. There's always the opportunity to learn something, even at the most unlikely of places. If you haven't surmised, I'm not a terribly pious man. To be honest, I don't know whether God exists. But I've always found that it's foolish to make needless enemies. "Better safe than sorry," said the virgin to the syphilitic.

EXT. EPISCOPAL CHURCH - LATER

We're following Francis and Claire as everyone files out.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)

Claire! Yoo-hoo!

They're approached by another power couple: the longtime Senator CHARLES HOLBURN and his socialite wife FELICITY, both immaculately groomed, styled and outfitted.

CLAIRE
Oh hi Felicity.

HOLBURN
Frank, good to see you.

FRANCIS
Likewise Charles.

FELICITY
(to Claire)
You're coming to book club this
Thursday, right?

CLAIRE
Wouldn't miss it for the world.

FELICITY
Have you finished the book yet?

CLAIRE
Well I -

FELICITY
It's just heartbreaking, isn't it?
When he falls from the branch?

Holburn pulls Francis aside as Felicity babbles on to Claire.

HOLBURN
I'm really sorry Frank.

FRANCIS
(playing dumb)
For what...?

HOLBURN
Kern. I would've bet a million
dollars Walker was going to choose
you.

FRANCIS
(laughs it off)
Good thing you have a million
dollars to spare.

HOLBURN
But Kern - come on. That's a real
insult, isn't it? He's got half
the experience you do, and less
than half the brain.

FRANCIS

I'm sure the President-Elect had his reasons.

HOLBURN

You're a bigger man than me, Frank. I don't know if I could be so understanding, especially with everybody talking about it...

FRANCIS

(chuckles)

I've never sought the lime-light Charles. I find it absurd that I'm the subject of any discussion at all. But no matter, tomorrow there will be something else to talk about and the limelight will shift to some other meaningless scrap of gossip.

We CUT TO Claire, who has overheard all of this as Felicity drones on beside her. Holburn waves to Kern, who clearly trumps Francis at this point.

HOLBURN

Hey Mike!
(to Francis)
Excuse me Frank.
(takes Felicity's arm)
Come dear.

And the two walk off toward Kern, who is already surrounded by a scrum of well-wishers.

CLAIRE

(under her breath)
What a bitch.

FRANCIS

Do you mean Charles, or his wife?

CLAIRE

Ugh. I'm dreading that book club. She's sitting on a fortune and she serves the most god-awful wine. I wouldn't be surprised if it came out of a box.

FRANCIS

You can inherit money, but you can't inherit taste.

CLAIRE

And Charles - the way he was trying
to humiliate you...It's degrading.

FRANCIS

My love...you and I have thicker
skins than that.

She notices a glint in his eye and knows exactly what it
means.

CLAIRE

(eyes lighting up)
You have something in the works,
don't you, you devil?

FRANCIS

Shhh...we're still on God's turf.

INT. O'NEAL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A cluttered high-rise apartment. O'Neal and his secretary
Christina are having wild, wall-pounding sex. As soon as
O'Neal climaxes with a primal yawp, he rolls over and pours
himself a drink from the night stand. Takes a sip.

O'NEAL

Fucking you is better than the
taste of single malt scotch, and
that's the highest compliment an
O'Neal can give.

CHRISTINA

How old is that bottle?

O'NEAL

(glances at the label)
Glenlivet. Twelve year.

CHRISTINA

Seems about the right age for you.

O'NEAL

Funny.

Christina gets up, starts to dress.

CHRISTINA

I'm almost thirty. That's ancient
in your book.

O'NEAL

Stop it.

CHRISTINA

You're not just gonna get your kicks, then toss me aside for some hussy straight out of college?

O'NEAL

I can't. You'd sue me for sexual harassment.

CHRISTINA

I'm serious.

O'NEAL

Oh - we're having that conversation now?

CHRISTINA

You do have a certain history Patrick.

O'NEAL

I don't deny it. But like you said, that's history. I'm different now. You've changed me.

CHRISTINA

(skeptical)

Uh-huh.

O'NEAL

Look, why are we even getting into this? Aren't you happy? We've been having fun.

CHRISTINA

It's been six months. This isn't just a little office fling anymore.

O'NEAL

You want me to say the three magic words, don't you? One of which starts with an L. Okay, I'll say them.

Christina turns to him longingly. He takes her hand.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)

Lick my balls.

She slaps him playfully. He wrestles her to the bed. They're both laughing. Now he's sincere.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)
I love you. I do. I love you
Christina.

She smiles, rolls on top, kisses him.

CHRISTINA
I love you too.

A beat.

O'NEAL
So will you lick my balls now?

She pushes him down for round two.

INT. UNDERWOOD'S OFFICE - MORNING

Underwood is working at his desk. Stamper knocks and peeks
his head in the door.

STAMPER
The Wicked Witch of Pennsylvania
Avenue is here.

FRANCIS
Thank you. Show her in.

Stamper disappears. Francis turns to the camera.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
I predict a tit for a tat. A
saggy, milkless tit that is.

He cranes his head to see her approaching down the hall.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
(sotto voce)
Hark. The enemy advances.

Vasquez enters carrying a folder. Francis stands.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Good morning Linda. I appreciate
you making the trip over here.

LINDA
My pleasure. You're a busy man
Frank.

FRANCIS
Not half as busy as you I imagine.
How can I be of service?

VASQUEZ
First things first...

She places the folder on his desk and opens it. There's a diagram within.

FRANCIS
What's this?

VASQUEZ
The seating chart for the
Inauguration.

She points to a pair of squares.

VASQUEZ (CONT'D)
How about these two for you and
Claire?

FRANCIS
Front row?

VASQUEZ
Which comes with a complimentary
set of tickets to the Red and White
Ball.

FRANCIS
You spoil me. Claire will be over
the moon.

VASQUEZ
Good, I'm glad.

FRANCIS
And in return?

VASQUEZ
Not in return for anything, Frank.
These seats are yours regardless.
(beat)
But we could use your help...

FRANCIS
The Education Overhaul I'm
guessing.

VASQUEZ
We have Harry Blythe drafting the
legislation.

FRANCIS
Blythe? The bill's going to be too
liberal.

VASQUEZ

Exactly, but Education has been his baby for twenty years. We have to let him take the lead.

FRANCIS

It'll be hard to drum up votes.

VASQUEZ

So I want you to advise him. Bring him toward the middle. We need this bill to pass smoothly.

FRANCIS

Consider it done.

Vasquez stands. Shakes his hand.

VASQUEZ

Thank you Frank.

(smirks)

I look forward to seeing you waltz.

FRANCIS

I'm from South Carolina, Linda. We don't waltz. We do the Charleston.

Linda chuckles and leaves. Francis turns to the camera.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

Just as predicted. One back scratched for another. But honestly, trying to buy me off with front row seats to the Inauguration? I give her credit. It's not bad as far as greasing the wheel goes, but she underestimates just how expensive my loyalty is. Francis Underwood does not come cheap, my friends.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - PANTRY - MORNING

Claire is on the phone with a friend from the book club, another politician's wife named CYNTHIA DAVIS. As they talk, Claire runs her hands along a wine rack in the pantry. We INTERCUT between the two.

CLAIRE

Francis is fine. To be honest, he didn't really want the nomination anyway. He's much more powerful in the Congress.

CYNTHIA
Selfishly I'm glad he's still
there. Now he can help Peter pass
his Estate Tax bill.

CLAIRE
When is Peter going to give up on
that?

CYNTHIA
My husband is a stubborn man, just
like yours.

CLAIRE
That bill has zero support.

CYNTHIA
Not if Frank gets involved.

CLAIRE
Are you asking me to talk to him?

CYNTHIA
I'm not asking you anything. I'm
presuming that best friends look
out for one another.

A beat. Claire takes this in. We see a glint in her eye.

CLAIRE
Let's discuss it at book club.

CYNTHIA
Do we really have to go?

CLAIRE
Yes we do.

CYNTHIA
It's just like my period - a
monthly education in misery. I was
thinking of quitting altogether.

CLAIRE
And leave me to endure Felicity
alone?

CYNTHIA
We should start our own book club.

CLAIRE
I think that might ruffle
Felicity's feathers.

CYNTHIA
Her feathers could use some
ruffling.

CLAIRE
True. So how about this. I'll
talk to Frank about Peter's bill...
(finds the bottle she's
looking for)
And you do me a favor in return...

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - NEWSROOM - DAY

Zoe is typing away at her desk. A FEMALE PHOTOGRAPHER glides
by with a large camera dangling around her neck. She pauses
at Zoe's cubicle.

PHOTOGRAPHER
Did you get the email I sent you?

ZOE
No. I haven't checked...

PHOTOGRAPHER
Open it up.

She does. A large photo fills the screen.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)
Thought you'd get a kick out of
this.
(points at the image)
See that? Look's like Frank
Underwood is a fan of your work.

We ZOOM IN on the image and see Francis staring straight down
at Zoe's traffic-stopping tits outside the Blair House.

PHOTOGRAPHER (CONT'D)
Next time wear a scarf, hon.

ZOE
You think that was an accident?

PHOTOGRAPHER
I'm just saying - if you want them
to take you seriously.

ZOE
He looks pretty serious to me.

PHOTOGRAPHER
I guess so.

ZOE
Modesty doesn't get you anywhere in
this town.

PHOTOGRAPHER
(laughs)
Alright - you keep workin' it girl.

And the photographer is off. Zoe looks back at the photo.
We see an idea stewing in her eyes.

INT. FRANCIS'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Francis and Stamper are having a brainstorming session.

STAMPER
Ferguson?

FRANCIS
Too old.

STAMPER
Willis?

FRANCIS
Too stupid.

STAMPER
Boyd?

FRANCIS
Queer as a three dollar bill.

STAMPER
Really?

FRANCIS
You didn't know?

STAMPER
Well he's married with two kids.

FRANCIS
As if that means anything.

STAMPER
What about Catherine Durant?

A beat. Francis leans back in his chair.

FRANCIS
Hmm. Catherine Durant.

INT. HOLBURN'S TOWNHOUSE - NIGHT

An elegant sitting room. A SERVANT is filling wine glasses for a gaggle of Politicians' WIVES, including Claire and Cynthia. Felicity hosts.

FELICITY

I think we should start with the title. "A SEPARATE PEACE." Anyone want to take a guess at what it means?

Claire tosses a glance to Cynthia. On cue, Cynthia starts to cough violently.

FELICITY (CONT'D)

Cynthia, are you okay?

CYNTHIA

(regaining composure)

I hate to say this...but I think your wine is a little off.

FELICITY

What...?

The others smell their wine.

CYNTHIA

Can anyone else tell?

The others don't want to seem ignorant about wine. They start to nod in agreement. We CUT TO Claire, who is clearly enjoying this.

FELICITY

(dismayed)

Well we'll open another bottle.

CYNTHIA

Actually...

Cynthia pulls a bottle out of her purse.

CYNTHIA (CONT'D)

I brought this just in case we ran out. Maybe we can give it a try.

Claire takes the bottle from Cynthia, looks at the label.

CLAIRE

'88 Chateau Belair!

Oohs and aahs from the other women.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)
We can't drink this. It's way too expensive.

FELICITY
Yes, really Cynthia. We can get another bottle from -

CYNTHIA
No no - it's fine. I know the owner of the winery. We have oodles of them at home.

CLAIRE
Wow - what a treat!
(hands the bottle to the servant)
Would you uncork this please?

All the women are excited to try the expensive wine. Felicity swims in a sea of embarrassment. There's a twinkle of vengeful victory in Claire's eyes as she exchanges a look with Cynthia.

EXT. HOLBURN'S TOWNHOUSE - LATER

As Claire and Cynthia leaves the book club arm and arm, they giggle to each other.

CLAIRE
Did you see her face?

CYNTHIA
If she wasn't so anorexic I would've thought she'd shit herself.

CLAIRE
All that would come out is air.

The two women share a wicked laugh.

EXT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - FRONT DOOR

TIGHT on a finger pushing the door bell. A moment later the door opens, revealing Francis. We CUT TO Zoe standing opposite.

ZOE
Congressman Underwood, my name is Zoe Barnes. I'm a reporter at the *Washington Herald*.

Francis glances at his watch.

ZOE (CONT'D)

I know it's late, but I was wondering if we could speak a moment.

FRANCIS

It's not only late, my dear, but we're miles from the Hill. My home is off limits. This is my sanctuary.

ZOE

Just one moment - please.

She gives him an innocent, desperate look. He melts a bit.

FRANCIS

Well come on in from the cold.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Francis pours drinks from the liquor cabinet. Hands one to Zoe, then sits across from her. Zoe takes a sip.

ZOE

It's strong.

FRANCIS

Would you like it weaker?

ZOE

No - the stronger the better.

She unwraps her scarf, revealing the same impressive cleavage Francis was staring at in the photo. He takes a quick glance, then finds her eyes again.

ZOE (CONT'D)

There's no harm in looking. You don't have to hide it.

FRANCIS

That's a cheap ploy, Ms. Barnes.

ZOE

Cheap but effective.

FRANCIS

If your ploy is to distract me - which you haven't.

ZOE

I don't want you distracted. I want you focused.

FRANCIS

Well you certainly have my undivided attention.

ZOE

Good, then I'll get straight to the point...

FRANCIS

Foreplay is over?

ZOE

I read somewhere that JFK never lasted more than three minutes.

FRANCIS

The point being?

ZOE

That time is precious. Powerful people don't have the luxury of foreplay.

He smiles, eyes narrowing.

FRANCIS

Why are you here Ms. Barnes?

ZOE

Because I need somebody I can trust, and who trusts me.

FRANCIS

You're in the wrong town for that.

ZOE

Maybe trust isn't the right word. An arrangement perhaps.

FRANCIS

As in...

ZOE

You confide in me, to the extent that you're comfortable...

FRANCIS

And in return...

ZOE
I protect your identity and print
what you tell me.

FRANCIS
What makes you think I don't
already have such an arrangement
with one of your colleagues?

ZOE
Because if you did, you wouldn't
have let me in the door.

Francis smiles. He's enjoying the repartee.

FRANCIS
I've had a very long, very
successful career avoiding this
sort of intrigue with the press. I
don't see any particular advantage
in starting now.

ZOE
But is there any disadvantage?

FRANCIS
Sloppiness, for one.

ZOE
I promise you absolute discretion.

FRANCIS
So we are talking about trust.

ZOE
Use whatever word you like, it
doesn't matter.

FRANCIS
Words matter very much. You should
know that Ms. Barnes, given your
profession.

ZOE
Then yes, your trust. Because if I
were to betray it I stand far less
of a chance surviving the
consequences. You could have me
fired and blacklisted, I'm sure of
it. The fact is I need you, far
more than you need me.

FRANCIS
What do you need exactly?

ZOE
The President-Elect's first
initiative.

FRANCIS
I see.

ZOE
Immigration is too controversial.
He doesn't have the political
capital for that yet. Tax-reform
isn't sexy enough. My guess is
Education.

FRANCIS
You very well might think that.

ZOE
So it is Education.

FRANCIS
I couldn't possibly comment.

ZOE
But you could confirm it. All I
need is a nod or a wink.

FRANCIS
It's late Ms. Barnes, and it's been
a long day.

ZOE
Can we speak again?

FRANCIS
A prudent man never makes a rash
decision unless forced by
necessity. And my only necessity
at the moment is a pillow beneath
my head. I hope you'll understand
if I'd prefer to sleep on all of
this.

ZOE
Of course.

FRANCIS
I'll show you to the door.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - FOYER - A MOMENT LATER

As Francis opens the door for Zoe, Claire is coming up the
steps.

CLAIRE
Oh...hello...

FRANCIS
Claire, this is Ms. Zoe Barnes,
from the *Washington Herald*.

ZOE
Very nice to meet you Mrs.
Underwood.

They shake hands. Claire offers a polite smile.

FRANCIS
(to Zoe)
Drive safe. There's lots of black
ice on the road.

ZOE
I will. Goodnight. And thank you.

Francis and Claire watch Zoe walk off.

CLAIRE
A reporter?

FRANCIS
A hungry reporter.

CLAIRE
Aren't they all hungry?

FRANCIS
Some more than others.

CLAIRE
She's quite young. And beautiful.

FRANCIS
She is, isn't she?

He turns his attention fully back to Claire.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
How was the book club?

CLAIRE
Delightful. Pour me a glass of
wine and I'll tell you all about
it.

EXT. MICHIGAN AVENUE - LATE AT NIGHT

A SPORTS CAR zooms down the empty boulevard. Moments later we see a SQUAD CAR pull out from a side street in pursuit.

EXT. MICHIGAN AVENUE - ONE MINUTE LATER

A POLICE OFFICER ambles up to the stopped sports car and aims his flashlight at the driver. It's O'Neal. He looks wasted.

O'NEAL
(slurring)
Can I help you officer?

POLICE OFFICER
License and registration.

O'NEAL
The glove compartment sweetheart.

We see that there's a CALL-GIRL in the passenger seat. She gets the registration out of the glove compartment.

O'NEAL (CONT'D)
Here you go. Registration.
License.

POLICE OFFICER
This isn't your license. It's a
Starbucks card.

O'NEAL
Oh...sorry about that.

POLICE OFFICER
Sir - have you been drinking?

O'NEAL
Starbucks? No, I don't drink
coffee at this hour.

The officer is not amused.

POLICE OFFICER
I'm going to need you to step out
of the car.

O'NEAL
Oh come on - I don't think that's
necessary do you? If I was
speeding just write me a ticket and
I'll -

POLICE OFFICER
Sir, out of the car. Right now.

O'NEAL
Alright listen, I don't want to sound like a prick, but I'm a member of Congress. I can show you my ID.

POLICE OFFICER
I don't care if you're the King of China.

O'NEAL
China doesn't have a King. It's a communist oligwock - ola - laaa - communist oligarchy. Man, that's hard to say.

The cop opens the door.

POLICE OFFICER
Let's go. Out.
(to the Call-Girl)
You too.

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - BEDROOM - LATER

The phone rings. Francis groggily answers it.

FRANCIS
Hello...?

STAMPER (O.S.)
It's Stamper. I'm sorry to bother you so late boss, but I've got some news...

INT. DINER - 4 AM

Francis is sitting alone in a booth sipping a cup of coffee in the deserted restaurant. There's an empty, greasy plate in front of him.

The door swings open, jangling a bell. In walks D.C. Commissioner BARNEY HULL - a square-jawed career law enforcer. He spots Francis, sits down across from him.

HULL
Frank...

FRANCIS
Oh let's not use names.

Hull looks at him quizzically. Francis smiles.

HULL
Well can I ask what this is about?
It's four in the morning and I got
a City Council briefing in...
(glances at his watch)
...less than five hours.

FRANCIS
I have no idea. I just stopped by
for a late night snack.
(wipes his mouth and
stands)
But it was very nice running into
you.

And Francis starts to go. Hull is perplexed. As Francis
exits, a figure slowly spins around on one of the stools at
the counter and faces Hull. It's Stamper.

STAMPER
Mind if I join you?

He slides into the booth where Francis was sitting.

HULL
Tell me what the fuck is going on?

STAMPER
Calm down. You want some tea?
Chamomile maybe? It's good for the
nerves.

HULL
I came here to meet with the
Congressman.

STAMPER
What Congressman? I don't see a
Congressman.

HULL
Cut the bullshit.

STAMPER
Okay.
(leans in close)
You've been Police Commissioner for
what - almost a decade now?

HULL
We here to talk about my resume?

STAMPER
Mayor of D.C. would look good on
that resume, wouldn't it?

Hull leans in closer.

HULL
I'm listening...

STAMPER
We know you've been angling to run
for some time. Experience is your
strong suit. Endorsements and fund-
raising aren't. But we can help
with that.

HULL
And the catch?

INT. FREDDY'S BBQ JOINT - MORNING

Francis sits completely alone devouring a rack of ribs. The
table is littered with crumpled napkins. As he feasts he
looks up to the camera.

FRANCIS
My one guilty pleasure is a good
baby back rib. Even at seven-
thirty in the morning. At this
hour I have the whole place to
myself. Freddy opens up just for
me...

We see FREDDY - the husky African-American proprietor -
setting the other tables. Francis licks his fingers.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
When I was a little boy in South
Carolina we didn't have two pennies
to rub together. A rack of ribs
was a luxury, like Christmas in
July. I've had a weakness for them
ever since.

Freddy starts to clear Francis's plate.

FREDDY
You want seconds Mr. U?

FRANCIS
Oh Freddy, you know me too well.
But I better not. All things in
moderation.

Freddy starts off. Scarcely a moment later...

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Actually, yes, bring me another
slab. I'm feeling hungry today.

And Francis winks to the camera.

INT. POLICE STATION - HOLDING CELL - EARLY MORNING

O'Neal sits on a bench, head held in hands after a long night being held in Police custody. The door slides open with a screech. O'Neal looks up to see a Cop flanked by Commissioner Hull.

O'NEAL
Did my lawyer get here?

HULL
You don't need one. You're free to
go.

O'Neal is confused, but he's not about to ask questions. He leaps up from the bench and exits the cell.

EXT. POLICE STATION - A MINUTE LATER

O'Neal squints at the morning sun as he hurries down the steps and onto the sidewalk. Pulls out his blackberry and dials.

O'NEAL
Christina - it's me. My car's in
the pound. You need to pick me up.
(beat)
I'll explain later.

INT. HIGH-END CLOTHING BOUTIQUE - LATE MORNING

Claire is shopping for a dress with Cynthia and Felicity. She models a beautiful gown.

CYNTHIA
It's gorgeous.

CLAIRE
Isn't it?
(to the SALESGIRL)
How much?

SALESGIRL
Twelve-thousand.

Cynthia and Felicity both raise their eyebrows. Claire whips out a credit card without a moment's hesitation.

CYNTHIA
Twelve-thousand Claire?

CLAIRE
Well I have to look good if I'm going to be sitting right behind the President on national television.

FELICITY
(surprised)
You'll be on the rostrum?

CLAIRE
Front row. And we'll be at the Vice President's table at the Red and White Ball.

FELICITY
(supremely jealous)
Oh.

CLAIRE
Will you be there?

FELICITY
(meekly)
No...Charles and I decided to go to the Liberty Ball this year.

CLAIRE
I don't believe the President will be attending the Liberty Ball, will he?

Felicity can barely contain herself.

FELICITY
You know what? I almost forgot, I have to...I have an appointment...the um...the dentist...Sorry to rush off.

And Felicity briskly exits the shop.

CLAIRE

Tsk tsk.

INT. FRANCIS'S OFFICE - LATE MORNING

Francis sits across from CATHERINE DURANT (early 50s), another conservative Democrat from the South.

FRANCIS

Catherine, we both value our time, so I'll cut to the chase. How would you like to be the next Secretary of State?

DURANT

(puzzled)

Walker just nominated Kern.

FRANCIS

Yes, but it's a long road to confirmation.

DURANT

Do you know something I don't?

FRANCIS

Let's say a skeleton peeked it's head out of the closet.

DURANT

Kern is a boy scout.

FRANCIS

Aren't they all?

Durant is intrigued by Francis's tone. She presses.

DURANT

Why are you asking me? Wouldn't you want it for yourself? Everyone knows you were a contender.

FRANCIS

The President-Elect did offer me the nomination, but I thought I could be of better use in Congress. I didn't, however, think he would nominate an imbecile in my place. What we need is someone like you in there.

DURANT
So what do you have in mind?

INT. REPRESENTATIVE BLYTHE'S OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER

Francis is flipping through a document as Rep. HAROLD BLYTHE looks on. Francis shakes his head, brow furrowed.

BLYTHE
Is something wrong?

FRANCIS
(holding up the document)
This is the only hard copy?

BLYTHE
Yes.

Francis goes over to the shredder, starts feeding the pages into it. Over the whir of the blades...

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
What are you doing?

FRANCIS
The bill is garbage, Harry. It's far too liberal. The ban on vouchers, tax increases, this ridiculous Federal oversight clause. There isn't a chance in hell I could whip up the votes with all that in there. You have to take it all out.

BLYTHE
But I -

FRANCIS
This comes straight from the top. You want this bill passed you'll do as I say. And soon.

BLYTHE
Okay - I'll do what I can.

FRANCIS
Good. I'll leave you be. You've got a lot of work to do.

As Francis exits.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Another thing Harry - make sure to
erase that version from your hard-
drive. We can't risk it falling
into the wrong hands. It would
cause a shitstorm in the press.

Harry nods, crestfallen.

INT. CHRISTINA'S CAR - LATE MORNING

Christina is driving, O'Neal's riding shotgun.

O'NEAL
It was just a few drinks.

CHRISTINA
You smell like a distillery.

O'NEAL
Okay, more than a few. But I was
in control.

CHRISTINA
Were you alone?

O'NEAL
Yes.

CHRISTINA
Say it to my face.

O'NEAL
Watch the road.

CHRISTINA
Say it to my face!

O'NEAL
Yes - I was alone!

CHRISTINA
You can't keep doing this Patrick.
Your luck is gonna run out
eventually.

O'NEAL
I know.

CHRISTINA
I'm not joking.

O'NEAL
I've learned my lesson, okay? I
really have this time. I mean it.

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

TIGHT on the door. A knock. A moment later the door opens,
revealing the CALL-GIRL we saw with O'Neal the night before.
We CUT TO to Stamper.

STAMPER
Come on in.

The Call-Girl takes a look around the room.

CALL-GIRL
Fancy...

She sits down provocatively on the edge of the bed.

CALL-GIRL (CONT'D)
So what would you like, sweetheart?

Stamper pulls an enormous wad out of his jacket pocket.
Tosses it to her. She starts to flip through the wad.

STAMPER
Ten thousand dollars. What will
that get me?

She looks up, a little frightened.

CALL-GIRL
You must be into some pretty
twisted shit, huh? If you're
willing to lay down this kinda
money? I mean I'm kinky, but I
don't know if I'm the right girl
you're looking for.

STAMPER
Oh you're definitely the girl I'm
looking for.

CALL-GIRL
(stands)
Hey - this doesn't feel right...

STAMPER
Relax. All I want for that money
is your silence.

CALL-GIRL
My silence...?

STAMPER
The guy you were with last night,
the one who got arrested. Do you
know who he was?

CALL-GIRL
You mean the Congressman?

STAMPER
There was no Congressman. There
was no arrest. None of it exists.
All that exists is the money you're
holding. You understand?

CALL-GIRL
Yeah, I think so.

STAMPER
Good.

Stamper pulls out some more money from his jacket. Folds it.

STAMPER (CONT'D)
Open your mouth.

She does, he gently slides the bills between her teeth.

STAMPER (CONT'D)
Here's four hundred more. This
last bit is for me.

He takes off his jacket and starts to unbutton his shirt.

INT. CAPITOL PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT

Francis is sitting in the back of his Sedan in a far corner
of the underground parking lot. Glances at his watch
impatiently. Glances out the window. Catches sight of what
he's waiting for.

We CUT TO a JANITOR rolling a large garbage bin toward the
car.

FRANCIS
He's coming.

Francis's Driver jumps out of the car and intercepts the
garbage man. We watch from Francis's POV. The two talk for
a second, then the Driver hands the Janitor several bills.
In return the Janitor hands him a large bag of trash.

The Janitor scurries back toward the elevator as the Driver comes back to the car with the bag. Francis opens the back door.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Give it to me.

The Driver hands him the bag. Francis opens it and pulls out a handful of shredded paper, the remnants of some large document.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Excellent.

He stuffs the shreds back in the bag. As the Driver gets back in the front seat...

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Let's go. Claire will kill me if I'm late.

EXT. KENNEDY CENTER - NIGHT

Francis and Claire step out of their chauffeured car into a sea of tuxedos and evening dresses. Also exiting the car are SENATOR WAYNE KITTEREDGE and his wife DEBORAH, the Francis's companions for the performance. As the foursome climbs the steps toward the lobby...

DEBORAH
...If her Carmen tonight is anything like her Tosca was last season, then we're in for a real treat.

CLAIRE
Thank you again for the tickets Deb.

DEBORAH
No - thank you. It's so hard to find people in this town who really appreciate opera the way you two do.

FRANCIS
I couldn't agree more.

INT. KENNEDY CENTER - BOX SEATS

The SOPRANO is on stage singing a thrilling aria from the final act of Carmen.

Francis sits attentively in his seat, watching through his opera glasses. He turns the glasses toward the camera...

FRANCIS

Truth be told, I wouldn't know the difference between an aria from Carmen and a bowl of grits, although I do know which of the two I'd far prefer. And yet, one must keep up appearances, mustn't one?

On stage the Soprano playing Carmen is having her throat slashed by her jealous former lover. The stage is awash in red ribbon symbolizing the blood. We CUT TO...

INT. UNDERWOOD RESIDENCE - LIVING ROOM - LATER

TIGHT on a TV screen. Another violent image fills the screen, but this one is from a first-person shooter video game (something like Halo or Call of Duty).

The "gunman" is blowing people away - blood, guts and screams - absolute mayhem.

We pull back to see Francis playing the game in his darkened living room. His bow-tie and tuxedo jacket lay in a heap on the floor next to him.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

In the privacy of my own home, however, I can do as I please.

Claire enters in a nightgown.

CLAIRE

Francis, you really should come to bed.

FRANCIS

I'll be up in a little while.

His eyes remain glued to the screen. She sighs.

CLAIRE

I need to ask you a favor by the way.

FRANCIS

I'm listening.

CLAIRE

Do you think we can arrange two more at our table for the Red and White Ball?

FRANCIS

For whom?

CLAIRE

The Holburns.

FRANCIS

Why on earth would we want them there?

CLAIRE

It's time to bring poor darling Felicity back into the fold. And Charles may be of use to you later.

Francis waves her over.

FRANCIS

Come give Daddy one of your good-night kisses.

She obliges.

CLAIRE

Don't stay up all night playing that awful thing. You have a big day tomorrow.

FRANCIS

Yes, yes, nag on.

She gives him another peck and pads up the stairs.

We CUT BACK to a CLOSE UP of the TV screen. More people continue to die in an unending storm of gunfire. Over this we hear the final aria from Carmen rise to a dramatic crescendo.

INT. NEWSROOM - DAY

ZOE is seated at her desk, typing furiously at her computer. She notices Lucas (the Deputy Editor) walking by.

ZOE

Lucas!

LUCAS

(continues walking)
I'm busy Zoe.

She leaps up, darts over and grabs his hand. As she tugs him back to her desk...

ZOE
Come on. I want you to look at something.

She points to her computer screen.

LUCAS
What am I looking at?

ZOE
It's a mock-up page for my blog.

TIGHT on the screen. We see a big header: "DefCon Now". The D and C of "defcon" are a much larger font than everything else so they stick out as "D C". Next to the header is a bright, sexy picture of Zoe with a serious and alluring pout.

LUCAS
Cute.

ZOE
Just cute?

LUCAS
I told you - it's not happening.

ZOE
This is what the paper needs. A big thick rail of journalistic blow right up D.C.'s nose.

LUCAS
Then we should have Marion Barry write a blog.

Her phone starts to ring.

ZOE
I'm serious Lucas.

LUCAS
(pointing to the screen)
That's not what "serious" looks like.

ZOE
Hear me out. Let me walk you through it...

LUCAS
(meaning the phone)
You should get that.

And he's off. Frustrated, Zoe grabs the phone.

ZOE
Zoe Barnes...

After a beat she stiffens, suddenly alert.

ZOE (CONT'D)
Yes, anywhere you want.

INT. NATIONAL GALLERY - DAY

Francis and Zoe are sitting side by side on a bench in front of a Thomas Eakins painting. It depicts two rowers in a skull.

FRANCIS
Do the math, Ms. Barnes.

ZOE
If Walker is going with
Education...

FRANCIS
What's step number one?

ZOE
He needs a bill...

FRANCIS
Correct. And who would sponsor such
a bill?

ZOE
He could have his own office draft
it, then find a stooge to sponsor.

FRANCIS
Wrong. It can't appear that it's
being rammed down Congress's
throat.

ZOE
And he needs to hedge himself if it
fails.

FRANCIS
Exactly.

ZOE
So who drafts the bill?

FRANCIS
You tell me.

ZOE
It could be anyone.

FRANCIS
Wrong again. This bill needs
legitimacy.

ZOE
Someone with experience on the
issue.

FRANCIS
Getting warmer.

Zoe thinks for a moment, then shakes her head.

ZOE
But the person who has the most
experience...

FRANCIS
Go on...

ZOE
He's way too liberal.

FRANCIS
Unless...

ZOE
You reign him in.

FRANCIS
I am the whip after all.

ZOE
So it is Harold Blythe?

FRANCIS
You might very well think that. I
couldn't possibly comment.

ZOE
Do you think he would talk to me?

FRANCIS

If he were the author of the bill,
I'm sure he'd be under strict
orders not to say a word on the
subject.

ZOE

Maybe somebody in his office, if I
butter them up. All I need is a
few crumbs.

Francis flips open a brief case. Pulls out a bulky manila
envelop and places it in Zoe's lap.

FRANCIS

How about a five-course dinner?

She peeks inside the envelope, pulls out a single shredded
piece of paper.

ZOE

Is this what I think it is?

Francis points to the painting.

FRANCIS

I just love this painting, don't
you?

Zoe looks up. TIGHT on the two rowers in the painting. Then
BACK TO the pair on the bench. Francis turns to Zoe.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

We're in the same boat now, Zoe.
Take care not to tip it over. If
you do, I can only save one of us
from drowning.

INT. ZOE'S APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

A cramped flat in Adams-Morgan, hopelessly messy and hip.
Zoe has all the shreds of paper dumped out on the living room
floor. She's meticulously matching them side by side and
taping them together.

INT. FRANCIS'S OFFICE - FRONT RECEPTION - LATER

Francis enters the front reception area where Patrick O'Neal
is waiting patiently.

FRANCIS
 So sorry for making you wait
 Patrick. Please, come into my
 office.
 (to the Receptionist)
 No calls please.

INT. FRANCIS'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Francis shuts the door behind them as O'Neal takes a seat.

FRANCIS
 Drink?

O'NEAL
 Uh sure...what do you got?

FRANCIS
 Whiskey. Bush Mills.

O'NEAL
 Well it's not quite cocktail hour,
 but what the hell, if you're
 offering.

Francis pours the drink and hands it to him.

FRANCIS
 So it seems you've been a bit of a
 bad boy.

O'NEAL
 What are you talking about?

FRANCIS
 Don't play dumb with me Patrick.
 Save it for the House Ethics
 Committee.

O'Neal freezes - a deer caught in headlights.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
 Drink up, you could use some
 courage right about now.

O'NEAL
 You're not having any?

FRANCIS
 It's a bit early in the day for me.

O'Neal sets his drink down.

O'NEAL
Is this about last night?

FRANCIS
Now we're making progress.

O'NEAL
How do you know about that?

FRANCIS
Because it's my job to know.

O'NEAL
Look - they let me off. There's no charges. It's all taken care of.

FRANCIS
Yes it is, isn't it? But honestly, Patrick, do you really think these things take care of themselves?

O'NEAL
You were the one who arranged for -

FRANCIS
Of course. Who else?

O'NEAL
It was just that once, Frank. I swear to God.

FRANCIS
Then you must hold God in very low favor, because we both know that's a lie. Drunk driving, prostitutes, cocaine - you've got quite a long list of hobbies. I'm surprised you can find the time to represent your constituents. What I should really have done is hang you out to dry. But then you'd be of no use to me, would you?

O'NEAL
What is it that you want?

FRANCIS
Your absolute, unquestioning loyalty.

O'NEAL
You got it.

FRANCIS
No matter what I ask you to do.

O'NEAL
Yes. Anything. Name it.

FRANCIS
Not now Patrick. But soon. There will be no shortage of things that you will do for me.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - VASQUEZ'S OFFICE - AFTERNOON

Francis and Vasquez are discussing Blythe's bill. Francis is upset.

VASQUEZ
So what do we do?

FRANCIS
He's an idiot. He has absolutely no sense of the political terrain at all. The bill he drafted is damn near communist. I felt like I was talking to a high school sophomore who just got finished reading *Das Kapital* for the first time.

VASQUEZ
We need a passable bill.

FRANCIS
Well lobbying Harry's bill will be like trying to pass a kidney stone the size of grapefruit.

VASQUEZ
So what do we do?

FRANCIS
I'm going to squeeze the grapefruit until there's nothing left but the juice. Then I'll toss a shitload of pork into the barrel. It'll taste pretty nasty, but I'll get the House to drink it.

VASQUEZ
You think you can get us a new draft in less than a week?

FRANCIS
Just after Inauguration?

VASQUEZ
That would be ideal.

FRANCIS
You're asking for a miracle. But
yes, I'll work one for you.

VASQUEZ
And Harry?

FRANCIS
He won't be happy. But my job
isn't to make people happy, right?

VASQUEZ
I have to say Frank, I really
appreciate how much hard work
you're putting into this.
Especially after, well...

FRANCIS
Ancient history. I'd never let
something like that get in the way
of moving our agenda forward.

VASQUEZ
That's exactly what I told the
President-Elect - that you're a
true Party soldier. You should
know he's very grateful.

FRANCIS
Speaking of Inauguration, I was
wondering - is there any chance you
could arrange to fit two more
guests at our table at the Ball?

VASQUEZ
Sure, I think I can make that
happen.

INT. BLAIR HOUSE - STAIRWELL - MOMENTS LATER

As Francis descends the stairs he speaks directly to the
camera.

FRANCIS
This is really starting to get fun.
I have to be careful not to let my
giddiness betray my betrayals.

He stops. We TIGHTEN on his face.

FRANCIS

Betray...it's such a scrumptious word, isn't it? To mislead, to deceive, to seduce. From the Latin "tradere" - to "hand over." And what am I handing over? A ticking bomb, wrapped in loyalty.

He starts descending the steps again.

FRANCIS

Six years of Latin in school and thank God for every minute of it. There's a lot to be learned from the Romans.

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - NEWSROOM - EVENING

Zoe makes a B-line for Deputy Editor Lucas Goodwin's office. As she barges in...

LUCAS

Where have you been all day? We need everyone in the office doing background for the Inauguration tomorrow and you just up and disappear? I mean really, Zoe, this sort of behavior is starting to -

ZOE

Shut up Lucas.

LUCAS

Excuse me?

ZOE

I said shut the fuck up.

LUCAS

Now listen -

But before he can finish she plops a large ream of paper on his desk. It's the taped up version of Blythe's Education bill.

ZOE

Take a look.

He picks it up, starts to flip through. His jaw drops.

LUCAS
Where did you get this?

ZOE
That's the wrong question. What you should be asking is when do I want to start my blog. The answer would be today.

LUCAS
We can't put this on a blog. This is front page material.

ZOE
Or we do both. Main story on the front page, additional commentary online. It's the perfect way to introduce me.

LUCAS
Deal.

ZOE
One more thing.

LUCAS
Isn't the blog enough?

ZOE
Only if I get to do it my way. I'll write the print version as dry as you want. But the blog is hands-off. Whatever style I want. No editing.

LUCAS
I'll have to talk that over with the Hammer.

ZOE
You do that...

She takes the Education bill out of his hands.

ZOE (CONT'D)
...and in the meantime, I'll hold onto this.

And she walks out the door.

EXT. THE MALL - MORNING

A WIDE PAN of massive crowds gathered for the Inauguration Ceremony on a crystal clear, January morning.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
Power is like real estate. It's
all about location, location,
location.

CUT TO the rostrum on the Capitol steps. Walker has his hand raised as CHIEF JUSTICE conducts the oath of office.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
The closer you are to the source,
the higher your property value.

We ZOOM IN on Francis and Claire sitting in the first row behind the lectern.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
A hundred years from now, when
people watch this footage, who will
they see smiling just at the edge
of the frame?

Francis gives a little waves to the camera.

CHIEF JUSTICE
So help you God.

WALKER
So help me God.

EXT. THE ROSTRUM - TEN MINUTES LATER

TIGHT on Walker in the midst of his Inaugural Address.

WALKER
...Today is not simply about the
next four years. It's about the
next four decades. You've placed
your faith in me, and I, in turn,
choose to place that faith in our
children. Our children are the key
to this nation's future, and that's
why the first order of business for
this administration will be a
comprehensive Education Reform Bill
to properly fix, finance and
strengthen our nation's schools.

Huge cheers from the audience. QUICK CUT TO Francis.

FRANCIS
(directly to the camera)
But you knew that already, didn't
you?

INT. RED AND WHITE BALL - NIGHT

A huge reception hall decorated to the hilt. The mood is festive. Francis and Claire are seated next to Charles and Felicity Holburn at the Vice-President's table. Felicity leans into Claire.

FELICITY
It was so kind of you to make this
possible Claire. I was so
surprised when you called me and -

CLAIRE
Not another word, darling. It was
my absolute pleasure. You know I'd
do anything for a close friend like
you.

SHIFT TO Secretary of State nominee Michael Kern.

KERN
..."Your dog must be a genius," the
guy says. "Nah," says the other
guy, "He's pretty stupid. Every
time he's got a good hand he sniffs
his ass."

Everyone at the table laughs at the punch line, Kern most of
all. Francis joins in the laughter, although we can tell
it's forced. He leans into Claire.

FRANCIS
(in a whisper)
The only thing worse than his
politics is his sense of humor.

CLAIRE
You should go mingle. I'll suffer
here for the both of us.

FRANCIS
I adore you.

CLAIRE
You'd better.

CUT TO Blythe standing awkwardly alone eating a crab cake at
the hors d'oeuvres table. Francis approaches.

FRANCIS
Maestro, I've been looking all over
for you.

Blythe fumbles with the crab cake, accidentally spilling it on
his lapel.

BLYTHE
Shit.

In an instant Francis has grabbed a napkin and begins dabbing
the stain.

BLYTHE (CONT'D)
Oh thanks...

FRANCIS
Truly outstanding work on the new
draft. Brilliant. You're going to
make history with that bill Harry.

BLYTHE
Thanks for all your help Frank.
Couldn't have done it without you.

FRANCIS
Did you hear how the crowds cheered
when the President mentioned
Education today? You're going to
be a national hero. Who knows,
maybe in eight years...

BLYTHE
(flattered)
No no...

FRANCIS
Don't sell yourself short.
Anything is possible.

Out of the corner of his eye, Francis spots Catherine Durant
near the dance floor.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Catherine!

She turns, smiles at seeing Francis.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Excuse me Harry.

And Francis glides over to Catherine.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
Well don't you look stunning.

DURANT
We Southern girls clean up well
when you get us out of the trailer
park and into some Vera Wang.

FRANCIS
And we Southern boys may be slow
with our words, but we're fast on
our feet.

He half bows, takes her hand and kisses it.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)
May I have the honor?

DURANT
You most certainly may.

He leads her onto the dance floor and they waltz in perfect,
graceful harmony.

INT. WASHINGTON HERALD - NEWSROOM - NIGHT

Everyone at the paper is hard at work finishing up the next
day's issue. Janine is in Hammerschmidt's office.

JANINE
You want me to cut it in half?!

HAMMERSCHMIDT
That's right.

JANINE
But this is the Inauguration.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
We need the room.

JANINE
For what?

HAMMERSCHMIDT
Zoe's article.

JANINE
Zoe Barnes?

HAMMERSCHMIDT
That's right.

JANINE
You're telling me the City Council
is gonna trump the President?

HAMMERSCHMIDT
It's not a City Council story.

JANINE
What is it?

HAMMERSCHMIDT
I can't tell you.

JANINE
But I'm your lead political
correspondent.

HAMMERSCHMIDT
Then you should have pulled in this
scoop yourself.

Janine looks through the interior window out to the bullpen.
From her POV we see Zoe at her cubicle with Lucas peering
over her shoulder and a cub reporter delivering research.

Zoe looks up and catches Janine's eye at the same time. She
offers a thin, devilish smile.

Back to Janine. She's fuming with jealousy.

EXT. PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE - EARLY MORNING

The streets are empty. Sanitation workers sweep up the
ticker tape from the previous day's celebration. Police
crews load barricades into flatbed trucks.

EXT. FREDDY'S BBQ JOINT - EARLY MORNING

It's a bitterly cold, bright sunny day. Francis arrives at
the restaurant with a newspaper tucked under his arm. Freddy
sees him approaching and opens the door for him.

FREDDY
Mornin' Mr. U.

FRANCIS
Morning Freddy. How are you?

FREDDY
Can't kick. Wanna come on in?

FRANCIS

Actually, would you mind setting up a table for me outside?

FREDDY

Outside? It's colder than a witch's tit out here.

FRANCIS

I'll be fine. A little cold never hurt anyone.

While Freddy busies himself bringing out the table and chair, Underwood takes a look at the front page of his newspaper. Zoe's breaking story, detailing the contents of the leaked Education Bill, occupies a huge swath of the front page. The headline reads:

EDUCATION BILL FAR LEFT OF CENTER

We PAN DOWN to see Zoe's byline in bold above the article.

QUICK MONTAGE

-- Blythe in his study staring at Zoe's blog online in horror.

-- Vasquez in the back of a sedan scrolling through her blackberry in even more horror.

-- Zoe, Lucas and Hammerschmidt gathered around a computer where a TECH GUY is monitoring a graph.

TECH GUY

The hit count is going through the roof.

Lucas and Hammerschmidt exchange satisfied looks.

BACK TO FRANCIS

By now Freddy has finished setting the outdoor table and heads back in to bring Francis a slab of ribs.

After he's gone, Francis sits down, leans back in the chair and closes his eyes. Smiles.

FRANCIS

The minister may be right. The test of one's true character is not how one enjoys victory, but how one endures defeat.

He opens his eyes - stares right at us piercingly.

FRANCIS (CONT'D)

But I'm not interested in testing
my character. I was put on this
planet to win. That's exactly what
I intend to do. And you're going
to fucking like it.

Closes his eyes again and leans back. Basks in the sun and
exhales a long, deep breath into the cold air.

The serenity of the visual shattered by sudden, thumping ROCK
MUSIC.

Black out.

THE END